

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 0798

EXDIS

FOR AF DICK MOOSE AND AF/W TOM SMITH FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP (CARTER, JIMMY)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT CARTER'S VISIT TO NIGERIA: UNHAPPY THOUGHTS

1. SHOULD I BE READING ANYTHING SINISTER INTO OUR REPEATED FAILURES TO OBTAIN GUIDANCE CONCERNING DATES FOR PRESIDENT CARTER'S PROPOSED VISIT TO NIGERIA? JUST TODAY I RECEIVED YET ANOTHER COMMUNICATION FROM OBASANJO, RELAYED TO ME FROM EX-AID MISSION DIRECTOR BILL FORD WHO IS A CLOSE PERSONAL FRIEND OF THE HEAD OF STATE, TO THE EFFECT THAT OUR CONTINUING DELAY IS CAUSING INCREASING EMBARRASSMENT TO DODAN BARRACKS. YOU KNOW THAT I AM NOT NORMALLY AN ALARMIST, BUT I OWE IT TO MY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE GOOD HEALTH OF THE US/NIGERIAN RELATIONSHIP TO ALERT YOU NOW TO THE IMPLICATIONS OF A POSSIBLE FURTHER POSTPONEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT.

2. FURTHER POSTPONEMENT WOULD HAVE DIRE CONSEQUENCES FOR OUR INTERESTS, NOT ONLY IN NIGERIA, BUT ALSO GENERALLY THROUGHOUT AFRICA. OUR CREDIBILITY HAS ALREADY ERODED BY VIRTUE OF THE FIRST POSTPONEMENT. THE CONTINUING DELAY

IN A NEW ANNOUNCEMENT IS PRODUCING INCREASING CRITICAL
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PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COMMENT EVERYDAY, PARTICULARLY IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE PRESIDENT'S VISITS ELSEWHERE. TO PUT OFF AFRICA AGAIN WILL FEED ALL KINDS OF SUSPICIONS ON THIS CONTINENT THAT ARE ALREADY GROWING IN THE LIGHT OF LACK OF EVIDENT PROGRESS ON THE ZIMBABWE AND NAMIBIA PROBLEMS AND THE CONFUSED SITUATION IN THE HORN. NOT TO COME TO AFRICA NOW WILL JEOPARDIZE A LOT OF WHAT THE PRESIDENT,

THE SECRETARY, ANDY YOUNG AND YOU HAVE WORKED SO HARD AND SO SUCCESSFULLY TO ACHIEVE OVER THE PAST YEAR.

3. EQUALLY IMPORTANT, THE BILATERAL CONSEQUENCES FOR OUR RELATIONS WITH NIGERIA WOULD BE SERIOUS AND FAR-REACHING. IF THE VISIT SHOULD NOW BE AGAIN DELAYED, WE WILL SUFFER NOT ONLY THE HEAVY FLACK PRODUCED BY INJURED PRIDE, REFURBISHED XENOPHOBIA, DASHED EXPECTATIONS, ETC., BUT ALSO INDIFFERENCE TOWARD IF NOT PURPOSEFUL SABOTAGE OF MANY OF THE HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT BILATERAL VENTURES WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO INITIATE SINCE THE OCTOBER CONVERSATIONS IN WASHINGTON. IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES FOR EXAMPLE, I WOULD BE OBLIGED TO PREDICT FAILURE FOR OUR CURRENT EFFORTS TO PUT TOGETHER THE AGREED WORKING GROUPS FOR WHICH WE HAVE HAD SUCH HIGH HOPES.

4. WE PERSUADED THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT TO SIT DOWN WITH US IN THE FIRST-EVER MULTI-DISCIPLINARY BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS IN NOVEMBER ONLY BECAUSE OUR NIGERIAN COUNTERPARTS KNEW THAT THE RESULTS OF THE DISCUSSIONS WOULD BE PUT BEFORE THE TWO HEADS OF STATE AT THEIR UPCOMING SECOND MEETING TOGETHER. IF THE SECOND MEETING DOES NOT TAKE PLACE SOON, WE STAND ALMOST CERTAINLY TO LOSE THIS INCOMPARABLE OPPORTUNITY FOR A WHOLE SERIES OF MAJOR STEPS FORWARD IN OUR ECONOMIC/TRADE/INVESTMENT RELATIONSHIP. FOR EXAMPLE, THE FIRST CARTER/OBASANJO CONVERSATION PROVIDED THE OCCASION FOR INITIATING HIGH-LEVEL ATTENTION TO THE ROADBLOCK CONFRONTING USEFUL OPIC ACTIVITY HERE. IT IS THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PRESSURE OF THE UPCOMING MEETING "AROUND EASTER" THAT IS PROVING TO BE OUR MAJOR LEVER IN MOVING A PROPOSED SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM THROUGH THE NIGERIAN BUREAUCRACY. ANOTHER EXAMPLE WOULD BE THE AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL INSURANCE COMPANY CASE. THE UPCOMING CARTER-OBASANJO MEETING PROVIDES OUR POSSIBLY ONLY REMAINING AVENUE TO AVOID AN EXTREMELY PAINFUL EXPROPRIATION DETERMINATION. EVEN MORE IMPORTANT, WE INCREASINGLY SEE THE UPCOMING CONVERSATION AS A LAST-DITCH FORUM FOR RESOLUTION OF CRITICAL PROBLEMS FACING OUR PETROLEUM SECTOR, PARTICULARLY THAT OF RENEGOTIATION OF COMPENSATION AGREEMENTS. THE WHITE HOUSE CAN COUNT ON SHARP PROTEST FROM OUR PETROLEUM INDUSTRY, AMONG OTHERS, IN THE EVENT OF A POSTPONEMENT.

5. IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WANT ME TO DO? I WOULD BE WILLING AND AM FULLY PREPARED TO SPEAK DIRECTLY WITH THE PRESIDENT OR THE SECRETARY. I THINK WE HAVE AN IMPRESSIVE CASE. I CAN WELL UNDERSTAND THAT DOMESTIC CONSIDERATIONS MUST WEIGH HEAVILY ON THIS QUESTION. THEY MAY OVER-RIDE WHATEVER CASE WE MAKE. I NONETHELESS BELIEVE WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO GIVE THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY THE FULLEST ADVANTAGE OF THE IMPLICATIONS WE PERCEIVE FROM WHERE WE STAND.

6. I HAVE SENT A MESSAGE ALONG SIMILAR LINES TO ANDY YOUNG.

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